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A Ribband *of* Blue

ANNE
SUTHERLAND



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A
Ribband
of
Blue

By
Anne Sutherland

Bid them that they make fringes in the borders of their garments, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue—that ye may look upon it and . . . remember My commandments. Numbers 15:38.

Numbers 15:38.

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God's Piper

SLIGHT and shy and nondescript,
Down the April way he came,
Barefoot lad without a purse,
Beggar lad without a name.
Only as he moved, the leaves
Leaned to whisper love to him,
And the water-lilies yearned
From the silver river-rim
To his feet. Soft-breasted birds
Came and fluttered round his head,
And the light wind stirred his hair,
Laughing at the things he said.
If you asked him what he piped,
He would smile and answer you:
"Whatsoever things are pure,
Whatsoever things are true,
Like the hawthorn's veil of bloom,
Like the linnet on her nest,
Like a babe's uncovered eyes,
Least of things and loveliest."
Did he leave no shapely print
Of his young, glad, restless feet,
Did no echo follow him,
Fairy music, faint and sweet,
Does it matter, save that he
Passed, an eager spirit-boy,
In his ragged robe of dream,
Piping beauty, piping joy?

One Daffodil

ONE daffodil's a lovely thing—
I think there is too much of Spring,
We miss in glory so complete
How every little thing is sweet;
Too many flying ribbands where
The earth's white throat has been so bare
And, for the very moment after
Winter, too much soft bird-laughter.
When all the world's a loveliness,
What is one pretty more or less?

If April meant just this—that from
The broken flesh of earth, in some
Hushed, tender moment, should arise
Toward the sun, toward the skies,
One slim, green, swaying body, grace
Personified, a piquant face
As golden as a star—ah me!
How we should look to't tremblingly
If this were all there is of Spring!
One daffodil's a lovely thing . . .



The Uncomforted

I KNOW. There will be other Springs,
And yet one only Spring for me,
When Love came trembling from my heart
Like blossom on the cherry-tree.
I know. The lark will still return
And lift his darling throat as then,
But never more for me will be
The first heart-shaking note again.

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



The Bird I Do Not Know

LONG, long before the waiting hills have frocked themselves in green,
Before the earliest daffodils have spread their golden sheen,
While yet the woodland way I go is crisp beneath my feet,
I hear the Bird-I-Do-Not-Know call distantly and sweet.

Not all the forest harmonies that later flood the air
Nor all the blossom canopies that whiten everywhere
Will set my eager soul aglow with such fierce joy as when
The gypsy Bird-I-Do-Not-Know comes calling me again!

O follow by the finger of the silver little spring
And find the violets I love and miss no tender thing
Of all sweet things that rouse and start—but never seek
to see
What faithful, little, singing heart brings April back to
me!



Moon-Song

THE world that has the moon in it is threaded softly grey
With sorrows that the Little Folk have never put away,
It holds me in the shine of it—but oh, it hurts to stay!
The Little Folk have hung their dreams on every troubled tree
And left their folded flower-hopes about for me to see,
And there's a wishful in the air that aches the heart of me.
Oh, sorry is the moon for it, and she meant for gay,
That hears them at their keening in the tired o' the day,
And cannot give the Little Folk their wee, foolish way!

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



The Circus Clown

WAS born in a little town in the State of Idaho,
And it wasn't into the sawdust-ring that I'd set my
heart to go,
But we mostly do what a stubborn Fate has planned for
us, you know.

I was bent on a preachin' life. It's the only dream I had
Since I was took to the meetin'-house, a bit of a wishful
lad,
I would gather the world to Christ and comfort the sick
and sad.

Then, when Pa was killed, steerin' the old Boisé Express,
Funds were pretty low, Ma was a cripple, more or less;
Well—this job was the nighest one that come to hand, I
guess.

'Tisn't bad at that. Nights, when we trek beneath the
stars,
God is nigh. God's in our sweat and laughter, too, and
far's
I could see, God was never too grand for circus-cars.

Guess He ain't displeased, watchin' His tired folks' faces
light
Up with the clean, smart line o' talk I hand 'em every
night—
That's one part o' the dream I got. I can cheer folk up,
all right.

Only, comin' to town, kiddin' the little folk I see,
I wish instead that I was havin' 'em close around my knee,
Tellin' 'em: "Suffer little childern"—jest for Him and me!

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

Prodigal

If Life is a garden,
Then I shall bend low
To look for small laughters,
Stand on tiptoe
To reach me a branch of
The whitest white song,
Wrap me in a lilac mirth
As I dance along.

If Life is a garden,
Then I shall toss the red
Confetti of its petals
High above my head:
When the sap withers
In the stem of me,
Time enough for pining
And for penury!



Horoscope

In ten or maybe twenty years
I shall have taught me not to weep,
And joy and sorrow, triumph, tears,
Will lightlier lie on me than sleep.

For ten or twenty years, maybe,
I shall be dreadful wise; but then,
If the gods be middling kind with me,
I shall be able to weep again.

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



Barefoot

MY black shoes go a careful way,
A modest way and neat,
With every other body's shoes
Along a proper street,
My black shoes go a careful way,
A dull way and discreet.

My silver shoes are frivolous,
They twinkle to Romance,
They shine a bit and hide a bit,
And flirt a bit, and dance;
And even grudging eyes will spare
My silver shoes a glance.

But when you look the other way,
I put my God's shoes on,
And, slim and brown, they take me down
The dark and up to Dawn,
And oh, they go a magic way
No other shoes have gone!



Walking

I KNOW this is a strange, fantastic thought,
But I have been conjecturing today
How all the folk who ride in motor-cars
And look at me that lofty, absent way,
Will feel in Heaven Street; if they will crowd
Together, dumbly, like a flock of sheep,
And have forgotten how their limbs perform
And that exultant rhythm a heart can keep

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

That moves to weariness. Oh, will the air
Of Heaven be keen, the harps be loud, to shake
Them back to beauty? They have been asleep,
Or blind, or dull, or slaved; they could not take
Their spirits from a crowded road. They missed
An old man's fiddled tune, a lame girl's smile,
And how the lilacs smelled and how the rain
Blew softly silver every little while.
God might be standing in a cottage-door
Calling young children to Him happily,
God might be standing in a cottage-door,
Haloed and bright, and they would never see.

* * * *

Maybe, though, I am wrong. Maybe, indeed,
It's hunting quiet Heaven Street they are,
The queer, grim, anxious folk who thunder by,
Lofty and absent, in a motor-car.



Storm

IHAVE been watching how the sky all day
Has wrung unquiet hands in body-grief,
And I have wondered in my foolish way
What she was waiting for, for her relief.
Darkened with grey contortionings of cloud,
Since that first red, unhealthy flush of Dawn,
It seemed as if she agonized, sweat-browed,
Above the anxious world she leaned upon.
Sick sky! From pain to cataclysmic pain
She moves, and gives her body, and is torn,
Till, in a silver weltering of rain,
A thousand flowers waken and are born.

Beguiled

HERE was a grass-grown, rutted lane, and a grey
bird in a tree
Crying "Come"; there were the venturesome, gypsy feet
of me,
There was a gap in the battered fence where the wire had
fallen low,
And a briar rose on a knoll ahead, and what could I do
but go?
And when I was over the fence there was a crooked little
way
Winding down and down. (Part of me whispered not to
stay,
But the rest of me never listened!) There was a purple
patch ahead,
And a frog came up and called to me out of his oozy bed.
The river had thrown a grist of pearl right to my very
feet,
And there were bouquets of wild strawberries, scarlet and
warm and sweet,
Fern in the rocks, and harebells, and a place for me to curl
In the deep, warm sand and stare at the silver fish in the
sunlit swirl.
A turtle came out of deep water and walked with his
queer pad-pad,
And nothing bothered or spoke to me. Everything seemed
glad
To have me there; and I never knew, but now I'm telling
you why,
If the bird in the grass-grown wheedles, whistle and
swagger by:
Don't be coaxed! Part of me never stirred nor answered
when
The rest of me said it was time to climb to the broad
highway again!

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

The Little Pale Prince

THE little, pale Prince goes riding by,
And Derek and Nathan and I,
At the door of the shop and the gate of the field,
Stand watching him pass, and our lips are sealed
To silence. Into the light he goes,
And round his figure the dust-clouds close.

Then Derek turns back to his little shop,
And silvery shavings drop
From his plane as it smooths at the shining board,
And Derek makes song for the Master Lord
Whose faithful 'prentice and slave is he—
Jesus, workman of Galilee!

And Nathan goes back to the good, grey earth,
And patiently tends at the birth
Of the little, green grain from the laboring sod,
And Nathan, who sweats for each torn, wet clod,
He whispers: "This is my pride to do,
The Lord God planted a garden too!"

And back to the tranquil hills I go
Where, drifting like scattered snow,
Are the little, new lambs who wait my care,
The little, weak lambs like the one He bare
To safety, cherished against His breast,
And I tell myself: "Lad, thou art blest!"

The little, pale Prince goes riding by,
And is there a grief in his eye
For the bare, little shop and the field and the hill,
Or is it for us who are standing so still
And might be watching him wistfully,
Derek and Nathan and me?

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



Lad, If Thee Be Wavering

LAD, if thee be wavering
In thy heart 'twixt these and me,
Hills aswoon with purple dream,
Leaf-love in a tree,
Fingers of the April moon
Twining softly through thy hair,
Tongues of little hidden streams
Whispering thee there,
Never doubt nor disobey,
Go and kneel at Beauty's shrine,
Then, if still thee be so sad
For my hand in thine,
Turn that dear, fair head and steal
Forth thy fingers happily:
Troth, is not thy little maid
Kneeling here by thee?



The Seed Catalogue

FLSPETH lives in the little room at the end of the corridor,
She gets her soup and her pot of tea and she doesn't ask for more,
And she never talks like the rest of us, of the days she knew before.

Only once, when the postman called and left her a gaudy book,
I saw her tear at the envelope with fingers that fairly shook
And carry it off to a quiet place with a quite transfigured look.

A RIBBAND OF BLUE

No one knows, but I think she dreams with a fearful energy,

Staking, furrowing, hoeing, planting, laboring happily,
Crying little blossom-ghosts awake in her memory.

No one sees, but I think the corner where Elspeth peers
above

Her gaudy book, is golden and green and scarlet with
vestments of
The spirits of dear, familiar blooms that Elspeth used to
love.

And, watching her, I've wondered whether the folk who
aren't on dole

Will get them any lovelier gardens than hers is, drear
and droll,

An old woman scattering heartsease through and through
her soul.



Bittersweet

I SHALL be alone, alone, alone,

For I will walk the hidden lofty Way
Of dreamers. I will breathe a sweetened air

And know the lyric things that skylarks say.

One song shall make me faint with loveliness,

One hyacinth my hungry spirit feed,

One leaning star shall bear me to the ground,

One wisp of childish laughter be my creed.

I hold the key to beauty and to truth,

Love blossoms crimson where I lay my hand,

I—I have lift the veil that covers God

And raptured cried, "I see. I understand."

My heart is but a magnet to His touch,

I know that I shall know, for I have known.

I am a poet. I will walk the Way,

But I shall go alone, alone, alone.

Such Lovely Things

IHAVE seen such lovely things
 As a low roof thatched with snow,
 Powdered gold on grey moths' wings,
 Young trees flushed with blossom-blow,
 All these—and a clovered sea
 With its swift, upsailing barque,
 But the loveliest come to me
 When the world is dark. . . .

I have heard the poet-bird
 Tell his raptures to the Dawn,
 Boys' bell-voices I have heard
 In a bright-toned carillon,
 Violins in symphony
 And an ancient, praying mill,
 But my own heart sings for me
 When the world is still. . . .

*The Unfinished Prayer*

SHE fell asleep before she said "Amen,"
 For she had taken many steps that day
 And labored with her hands and with her heart,
 And now she was too tired, almost, to pray.
 Not extraordinary her routine:
 A home to keep, four hungry mouths to feed,
 Four little bodies to be cleansed and clothed—
 But oh, her work seemed never done! Indeed,
 She went to bed sometimes on a regret,
 Her sleep was often troubled with the thought
 Of this and that small thing she had put off,

A RIBBAND OF BLUE

And this and that, alas, she had forgot!
She tried so hard to have a tranquil faith
But keeping brave and, harder, keeping sweet,
Took so much heart that by the end of day
Her weariness was aching and complete.

She fell asleep before she said "Amen,"
Worn out with laughter and with love and care,
And God looked down upon her shadowed cheek
And smiled and stooped for her unfinished prayer,
And turned it gently over in His hand,
Eager and soft and so uncomforted:
"It has a broken wing, but none the less
Somehow it seemeth beautiful!" He said.



Pilgrimage

PILGRIMAGE is only sweet if you must say good-bye,
If there be little tender things to travel in your
mind,
If every little house you pass and every garden cry
The little house and garden that you had to leave
behind.

Pilgrimage is only sweet with half a heart to go,
And half a heart a-waiting for the other half's return,
If there be voices whispering how they will miss you so,
And little fires kept bright for you and little lamps that
burn.

You may be off to London-Town to supper with the King,
Or just to Kew in blossom-time. I care not where nor
when,

Pilgrimage is only sweet with your remembering
The path that led your feet away will bring them home
again.

The Thirteenth Disciple

I WONDER, when the rabble cried
"Nay, let Him now be crucified!"
Did not the spirits of His trees
Bend low in tender agonies,
Did not the green bough writhe away
From the sharp axe that sorry day,
And all the forest heavy brood
On whose shamed branch should be His Rood?

I wonder, while His flesh grew cold
Against the wood, if 'chance He told
A tree's grey spirit, broken, dumb,
So softly none might hear it, some
Divinely brave and lovely thing
Of courage and of comforting?

I cannot tell. I only know
That, stricken, shamed and beaten so,
I fling my arms out hungrily
'Round the great body of a tree
And, with my throbbing forehead pressed
To that rough, understanding breast,
Feel a sweet Strength come thrilling through
My veins—till I am risen, too.

September

I LIKE the world untidy as it is today,
Dandelions all gone mad and danced away,
Slattern geese trolloping a lazy trail,
Golden-rod rusting on the clean fence rail,
Beads of scarlet berries strung on any breeze,
Bits of broken sunsets falling through the trees!

The Pastoral Visit to the Poorhouse

LAWNS, I ain't complainin'! 'Course if it's true, it's true,
Only I won't feel right at home, spangled and starched
and new,
Up in the proper Heaven he's bound to take me to!

Mebbe I shouldn't speak so, but it seems I couldn't bear
(After my own old make-shift clothes I been so used to
wear)

Struttin' 'round in a grand, white gown, with a crown
upon my hair.

Ever'thing else I'll come to like, I guess, though it will be
queer

Playin' harps, after I've scrubbed the floor and washed
down here,

Laws! but I dread them brand-new robes with a kind o'
sinkin' fear!

Think I'll ask, when he comes again, if up in his Heaven,
p'raps,

After the angels' robes is sewn and the bits fall from their
laps,

I couldn't make me a nice, neat dress and an apern from
the scraps?



Spinster

IN all her soul's drab merchandise
Miss Hester had three lovely things:

A fragile, scented memory,
A hope with eager, shining wings,
A little wistful, timid dream.
One morning, curiously gay,

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

She moved her other wares and set
The three bright treasures on display.
Nobody saw Miss Hester crouch
Behind her soul's grey-curtained glass,
Or knew she hushed her heart to hear
The praise of people who should pass.
They saw her memory, and laughed;
They found her hope and stared surprise—
Miss Hester snatched her dream away,
The shamed tears crowding to her eyes.

* * *

Of doubt and such dark merchandise
Miss Hester keeps an ample store;
Once she had lovely things to sell,
But no one wants them any more.

~

Prayer Against Fame

GOD, whatever else You give me,
Never give me fame,
Let no stranger tongue manhandle
My own father's name.
Let me walk and sing and worship
To Your eyes alone,
Not that gait and song and prayer
Will be told and known.
Give me windswept ways to wander,
Lonely ways and sweet,
Rather than the restless people
Scabbing at my feet,
God, and put me in a dungeon
With my misery,
Rather than a cage, with faces
Staring in at me!

The Flighty Commodity

I ENVY all these tranquil folk
Whom Heaven weighs so carefully.
They never either bump the earth,
Or ride the scales sky-high, like me.
I think it must be fine to sit,
With lofty smile and cautious eye,
And measure equal parts of joy
And gloom to every passerby.
This hectic life I have to live,
One moment burdened down with woe,
The next in soaring ecstasy,
It's very hard on me, you know,
My breathing's always disarranged
With rapid journeys through the air;
My face unfolds and blows about,
My heart is simply everywhere!
Still, every cloud is silver-lined,
Some day I'll bounce up on a shelf
And stay there, reaching down to you
With joyful parcels of myself!



Noel

O LITTLE CHRIST! O little Christ!
Well may Thy wondering baby eyes
Look on us with a grave surprise
Who keep tonight the simple tryst.

Not shepherds we in homely shrift,
Forsaking fen and field and fold,
To stumble o'er the starry wold
And bring some foolish, lovely gift.

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

We be indeed a motley throng,
On shabby feet, in shining cars,
Yet looking to the selfsame stars,
And thrilling to the old, old song.

The sinner and the saint draw near:
Who doubts, who stands by sophistry,
Who points the manger avidly,
The children of the day are here.

O little Christ, despise us not,
Nor see our eyes with fear bemused,
Nor hear our speech with prides confused,
Nor penetrate our puny thought;

Let but the wise man come tonight
And shamefully admit him fool.
Let the self-righteous flee his rule
And plead him sinner in Thy sight.

Remember not our pride of years,
Nor yet our arrogance of youth,
Give us to bear the gift of truth
And tell our helplessness, our fears,

Our yearning toward the simple tryst
In all the troubled maze of things,
The Song of Songs that swells and sings
Thy happy birth, O little Christ!



The Grateful Guest

I MUST be very careful when
At last I go away
To leave this earthly chamber just
As pretty and as gay

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

As when I crossed its threshold. He
Who brought me here a guest,
He has been gentle to my needs
And made my sojourn blest.
He gave me day and eager feet
And dusk and sweet content,
And laughter was a creed for me
And love a sacrament.
Now let me leave no crumpled faiths
About, no dingy fears,
Let there be no long sighs for me,
No wondering, no tears,
But simply here a book that falls
Wide-open to a prayer,
And reddened embers on the hearth,
And fragrance in the air
Of my bright words. And if I leave
Behind me any thing,
Let it be very beautiful
For my remembering.

Sabbath

¶ LIKE this day that God has planned,
The valley village, still and sweet,
Within its cup of sun, and spanned
In cloudless blue. Long shadows meet
Reposefully of old, old trees
In friendly conclave on the snow,
And little, blurry shadows tease
Among them, dancing as they go.
Each little house is shut away
Alone with its peculiar cares,
This is the holy Sabbath day,
And let him mar its peace who dares!

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

The very smoke curls tranquilly
From cottage roofs, and in the sun
Sedate old dogs with dignity
Prepare their slumbers, one by one.
At length, from some far watching hill
The church-spire cries its carillon,
And, though the streets are gentle still,
The languor suddenly is gone.
Each little house its door flings wide
And forth, arrayed in careful best,
The father, with a sober pride,
Ushers his own and loveliest.
Obedient to some wondrous thing,
Some age-old, sweet, compelling Strength
That brought their fathers comforting
And safely harbored them at length,
From every way they come till I
Imagine Fingers wide outspread
To gather all these treasures nigh,
And keep them safe and comforted.
O wise and happy souls who own
This pristine Sabbath! We have strayed
Who other Sabbath days have known—
This is the Day the Lord hath made.



The Fiddler in Church

■ SAW last Sunday in a little church,
(A white and lowly, but a gentle place),
In one shy corner near the organ-loft,
An old, old man with such a happy face,
Fiddling the hymns out with an earnest bow.
His music, high and thin and subtly sweet,
Ran like a silver hem along the grave,

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

Grey tapestry of singing, making neat
True knots of melody to end each verse.

The fiddler's eyes but rarely left the score,
They seemed to love the dear, familiar thing
That had been comfort oftentimes before.

I liked to think that God was listening
From His high Heaven for the fiddle-strain,
One Hand upraised to hush the golden harps,
That this wee, gallant voice might sound more plain;
I liked to think of angels making room
In that devout, celestial symphony,
For one old fiddler, when his moment came
To join the players. Oh, it seemed to me
So cheering and so beautiful a thing
That he, with care and labor in his wake,
Should be thus tranquil to his summoning,
To sit and smile, and with his fiddle make
Him little hymns, old, dear, familiar tunes,
No troubled, complex thing folk could not know,
But simply, "I believe"—a good old man
Telling his faith out with his fiddle-bow.

The Church of The Holy Trinity Toronto, Canada

(Above whose chancel runs the text:
*This is none other than the House of God:
this is none other than the Gate of Heaven.*)

I THINK our Lord, were He to come on earth
And choose with His own eyes a dwelling-place,
Would have it not too big and not too grand,
But grey and kindly, sweetened with the grace
Of all old things.

I think that He would like

A RIBBAND OF BLUE

No garish splendor and no gross display;
A house that held a tenderness for all
Who hungered and who happened by that way;
A house whose door was open to the street,
A house whose roof looked upward to the sky,
Whose windows set a light of comforting
Upon their sills, for strangers passing by.

How rich a hospitality this house
Would have—the filling Bread, the living Wine,
The lavish Hand to give, the listening Ear,
The Heart o'erflowing with a Love Divine.
I think our Lord, were He to happen on
So sweet a place, would smile, and whisper then,
“Blest be this little House, and Heaven be here
To all who come a-seeking it. Amen!”



Faux Pas

I WISH you had not come so eagerly
With votive friendship. When I saw you first
All things about you interested me.
I wanted then to learn your best and worst
In slow, delighting phases; for I knew
That something you had hidden, rich and fine,
Within the casual and smiling you
Might mate with something beautiful of mine.
I wish you had been silent or been slow
To speak, and had withheld the lovely thing
I wanted. Now I shall not prize it so.
I should have liked to watch its beckoning
A little while, and dream and pray and walk
Up softly then and touch it at my will.
Alas! Why must you lean and wave and knock
The white, young taper from your window-sill?

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

The Organ Recital

GO tell the Master of this holy House,
Since He hath entertained me in this wise,
There is not any vow I will not take
To serve Him as is fittest in His eyes.

Tell Him that I am waiting in the dim
And lovely shadows of His dwelling place
To hear His will: my hand and heart are His
When the high summons comes to do His grace.

I will be shining knight to seek His Grail,
Or meek nun cloistered in His anchorhold,
I will be good physician for His sick,
String to His harp or shepherd in His fold.

I will break bread to feed His hungry mouths,
As He hath broken to my spirit here,
Or keep sweet comfort for His weary feet,
As mine have found this sanctuary dear.

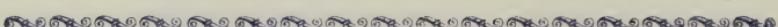
Now, with His silence and His sunset round,
A willing vassal waits upon her knees,
Her soul one ache of listening—Ah, go,
Go tell mine Host that I am ready, please.



If I Have To Be a Little Old Lady

IFF I have to be a little old lady,
The kind of old lady I'll have to be
Is wrinkled and rosy and tender and cosy,
A sort of nicer edition of me.

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



I'll want to run me a little shop where
Folk can come and carry away
Comforts, all sizes. (The pleasant surprise is
Nobody ever requested to pay.)

Loaves of comfort for hungry mouths and
Comforty blankets for shabby feet,
Comfort flowers for dreary hours,
Babykin comforters, fat and sweet.

I'll have to be dressed in a clean, white pinny,
The sort of pinny that smells of sun,
And customers choosey or very refusey,
I'll open my arms out and love each one.

I'm quite aware that it sounds so silly,
But nevertheless, as I say to me,
If I have to be a little old lady,
That's the old lady I'll have to be!



To a Despoiler

THIS is the all of Life to me: this thing
You hold as valueless. Right from my baby days
I quested for it, thought the capering
Of sun-motes hid it; sought in childish ways
To wrest it from a butterfly, a bee;
Hurt myself, cried, and started out again.
All through the years it danced ahead of me
And I eluded signs and shouts and men
To find it.

(Bows on fiddle-throats can show
The pale, ecstatic scar; an iris-breath
Is hot with it; the first glad, frightened glow
Of Dawn; the last sharp, tuneful sigh of Death.)

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

I sang. And suddenly, from out the vain
And ghostly shadows it was sweetly mine,
All its brave heritage of dream and pain
Warming my spirit like a god's own wine.

And you are pouring, drop by precious drop,
The draught upon the ground, and wiping dry
The cup that held it. Will you see, and stop,
Or will you squeeze the vessel out till I
Rock in white anguish?

Even then, when you
Lay the old chalice from your selfish hand,
Broken, that might have been a Grail—who knew?—
Will you be sorry? Will you understand?

The Culprit

SIN mangles Life. We have no right to say
With bitter scorn and grim finality,
"Life is not worth the hard-drawn price we pay,
Life has betrayed our long fidelity!"
I tell you, Life, as God bestows it first,
A great and lovely gift, is fair as morn,
He cursed a patient sacrament who cursed
The sweet, white, breathless moment he was born.

Sin mangles Life. Sin cuts with bloody steel
The splendid, singing throat, and pours a mess
Of poison through the wound lest it should heal
And shine again with the old loveliness.
And on this sick, shamed, sorry thing we cry
Our malediction, while, a pace ahead,
Glides the true culprit with her red-rimmed eye,
Her smiling mouth and soft hands dripping red.

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E



The Leaner

ALL her soft life she has had someone's arm
To lean upon. Her feet have never grown
Accustomed to their burden. (Can you harm
A limp-winged butterfly, or leave alone
A bird that will not fly from horses' hooves?)
She has been sadly safe from wind and rain,
Padding along in comfortable grooves
Of care and kindness. Kept apart from pain,
She has been kept apart from glory too.
She learned no splendid lessons of her sins.
She had no will to sing and dare and do,
She made her life in lace, with trembling pins.

Strange to be wondering, when she is dead,
How she has fared, who had no single thing
For Heaven to see.

Think you some angel said:
"Forgive her, God. She hath a drooping wing . . . ?



Tired Little Boots

NEVER mind his toys so much, his ball,
His ellefunt, his battered truck, for they
Don't mind his going off to bed at all;
They seem quite happy to be put away.
His li'l, brack baby grins her scarlet grin,
(Though he has left her standing on her head,)
And Teddy Bear is cuddled to his chin,
Who sleeps so sweetly in his little bed.
But, folding up his small, warm under-clothes,
And shaking out his mussy, romped-in suits,

A - R I B B A N D - O F - B L U E

With trailing ties and scuffed and shabby toes

I come upon his tired little boots,

One leaned against the other lonesomely,

So brave, yet so forlorn a little pair,

Worn out with all the pilgrimages he

Made through the day: I find them waiting there,
Tired, but still faithful; and with cheeks all wet

With tears, I kneel beside them, making some
Small, hushed entreaty.

“God, don’t ever let

His little boots be here—and him not come!”



Sally Anne

SUSAN’S very beautiful, with bright gold hair,
Pink silk petticoats and white kid shoes.

Susan says “Ma-Ma” when I press her there.

(Grandpa took me down-town and said I was to choose.)

Susan’s very beautiful and Grandpa’s very jolly,
But—Sally Anne Sutherland was my first dolly!

Bunty is a baby doll. Bunty goes to sleep.

Bunty has a bottle, and a rattle, and a shawl.

Mother gave me Bunty, and she’s mine to keep,

Still—I like my Sally Anne the best of all.

Maybe it is wrong of me. It’s very silly, maybe,
But—Sally Anne Sutherland was my first baby!

Sally Anne has lost her wig and has to wear a hat

Even when she goes to bed. Sally’s arm is broke.

Sally Anne’s raggedy. (I don’t mind that!)

Sally Anne’s funny, but she makes me kind of choke.

Sally Anne’s eye is out; she looks a little wild,

But—Sally Anne Sutherland was my first child!

